

N.S. rural communities need imagination, not imposition



BY MARIKE FINLAY

Bill Black (in a Chronicle Herald column, Nov 13 2012) has suggested that rural communities must accept government-imposed, foreign-owned, polluting industries, such as Loch Duart's proposed open-pen salmon feedlots in bays in HRM, to create jobs and reverse de-population.

Citizens of the Eastern Shore simply do not accept a top-down approach from urban politicians and businessmen that imposes destructive resource exploitation on their neighbourhoods. Instead, the Sheet Harbour Chamber of Commerce will hold an economic forum next spring to facilitate our citizens and governments to IMAGINE low-capital-intensive, sustainable growth strategies for genuine progress.

First, let governments protect the rural jobs we already have. The Eastern Shore's economic backbone is a lobster fishery, tourism, sustainable forestry, retirement and seasonal in-settlement, service-sector businesses, health care and educational institutions. Don't harm these economies.

Stop the hemorrhaging of jobs: keep health and educational services in the community, rather than centralizing them in metro.

Our lobster exporters are imagining premium pricing justified by “traceability” that shows how pure, wild, sustainable and untainted our lobster are. Imaginative marketing could also obtain premiums for the Eastern Shore’s shellfish aquaculture. But imagine what jumbo jet-size loads of salmon feedlot waste and plumes of insecticides to treat sea lice will do to that branding. Our community imagines we could be on the cutting edge of future sustainable fin-fish aquaculture by hosting closed containment production (on land and in water). Closed containment *is* economically viable once the millions of dollars of government subsidies to open-pen feedlots are subtracted.

Our tourist organizations, TIANS and DEANS, have condemned the imposition of polluting and unsightly open-pen salmon feedlots because the Eastern Shore’s tourist brand is “Pristine Unspoiled Nature.” Imagine capitalizing on our archipelago, named by Samuel de Champlain “The Bay of Isles,” a unique geological wildlife area. Imagine creating a marine parks system here, like the one in British Columbia. Market it to thousands of recreational boaters along the entire Northeastern Seaboard.

In Europe (Compostella Trail) and Quebec (Green Ways), heritage destinations are linked by hiking and biking trails that attract thousands of visitors. The Eastern Shore possesses these heritage destinations; we just need to imagine linking the seaside loops with signed trails, then deploy social media for smart, targeted promotion.

A crafts store in Sheet Harbour now handles over 70 local artists and crafters. For every dollar of industry support for arts and culture, between \$14 and \$17 return directly to the community. Imagine defining the Eastern Shore as the Creative Shore, recruiting artists, musicians and crafters to settle, create, exhibit, sell and teach here. In this spirit, the Chamber of Commerce is planning a multi-purpose centre attached to the new consolidated school to host concerts, exhibi-tions and extension courses.

Economist Jane Jacobs has argued the wealth of cities drives the wealth of rural areas through import and export replacement. The Eastern Shore is very close to Halifax-Dartmouth, the international airport and the gateway. Settlement is expanding east along Highway 7. High-speed Internet enables telecommuters. The wharf, now part of Halifax Port Authority, offers break-bulk handling. Lands will be laid down for an industrial park.

But let’s dare to think outside the box, starting with demographics; Canadians are alone, stressed, overweight, inactive, in debt and hate commuting.

Imagine advertising the Eastern Shore's very real sense of community, pedestrian pace of life, venues for healthy living, eating and exercise, and reasonably priced real estate.

Imagine converting the under-utilized Liscombe Lodge into a health resort, like Canyon Ranch, U.S.A., where guests pay big bucks to lose a few pounds, learn healthy dietetics, recover from an illness, start an exercise regime, receive alternative health treatments, and de-stress in a serene natural setting.

Imagine the return of lucrative recreational angling once the West River's wild salmon runs are fully restored.

Sheet Harbour already has a multi-step plan, imagined by Ekistics. The new streetscape is beautiful! Still to come: a marina, amphitheatre, walking trails and falls look-out. "Come to Quality of Life — Gateway to the Bay of Isles."

Imagine how, rather than exporting millions in fuel and electricity bills, we might keep that money in the community: solar panels and wind generators for homes and businesses.

Imagine industry and educational support to create a healthy, value-added, sustainable local seafood movement based on our lobster, mussels, oysters, wild fish, and eventually closed-containment fin fish, that creates many more jobs for our own wild-catch fishers, smokers, producers, exporters and restaurateurs than salmon feedlots will.

The inhabitants of the Eastern Shore, with a little help from governments, can IMAGINE and CREATE a place of pride, rather than host foreign-owned, damaging sunset industries.

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